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Interview with Knut Dorn

Katina Strauch
College of Charleston

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Interview — Dr. Knut Dorn

Managing Director — Harrassowitz

by Katina Strauch (College of Charleston)

The building faces a beautiful square and looks down on a park and actual fountain of "the water" (sulfur — Wiesbaden was a spa even in Roman times). Located in four joined Victorian (they call it Wilhelminian) houses in downtown Wiesbaden, right across from the Kochbrunnen, the largest of the springs of Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz exudes the charm of academia. PCs amid professorial offices. In the middle of all this, is the office of the smilingly affable and amazingly energetic Knut Dorn. He slowed down long enough to talk to us! (It was on a Saturday after all!) - KS

ATG: There is an incredible mystique about Harrassowitz. Tell us about the origins of the company and how you got involved with this business.

KD: My life was determined by Harrassowitz from a very early age. I was born in Munich, but, only a few months later, my father accepted the position of a department head at Harrassowitz, and the family moved to Leipzig in 1936. It was no accident that Harrassowitz, by that time a well established publisher and book distributor with close connections to libraries in the USA, China, and the East European countries, was located in Leipzig. This city had been the center of the book world for a long time. Late in the 19th and early in the 20th century, every international publisher or large book distributor had to be in Leipzig in order to function. So it was only logical that **Otto Harrassowitz**, the ambitious founder, chose Leipzig as the place for his company in 1872. After he had been apprenticed as a bookdealer and thus been officially initiated into the profession, he set out as a second-hand dealer. The date of December 5, 1882 became important to Otto since it was on that day that **Justin Winsor**, the then **Harvard Librarian**, wrote to tell Otto how pleased he was with the bibliographic accuracy of the Harrassowitz catalogs as well as the pricing. Mr. Winsor asked Otto if he would be willing to accept orders also for in-print materials from Harvard. On December 23, Otto wrote to say that he was indeed willing to do so, and he submitted terms that Harvard accepted. Our originals of this first exchange of letters with a US research library were destroyed, together with the archives and all of the company, during the fatal air raid of December 3, 1943, in which the parts of Leipzig that occupied the domiciles of the publishers and the other members of the booktrade were flattened by the bombing. But Harvard still has their copies in their archive, and we were given a facsimile on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of a continuous business relationship with the **Widener Library**.

Harvard's decision circulated amongst librarians, and, by the



turn of the century, Harrassowitz had the accounts of more than 50 research libraries in the United States. The 1st World War threatened to sever the association, but Otto decided to continue the standing orders and subscriptions for his customers throughout the war years. While every exchange of goods stopped during the war, Otto kept his warehouse stocked with the journals and continuations that would otherwise have gone to his American library customers. After the war, he, or rather his son **Hans**, who had followed him, delivered the backfiles that had accumulated to their clients. This made library history and was a major achievement which was later repeated in World War II. While the company of Harrassowitz in Leipzig was completely destroyed, all five locations in the German countryside where the books and journals for American libraries had been

stored survived. Two of the locations fell into the hands of the Russian army, which set up bonfires with part of the collection, while they transported the rest to the Soviet Union. But the fact that three out of the five barns in the countryside had survived was reason enough for the **Library of Congress** to send a mission and to make sure that the books and journal issues got to America and were distributed to research libraries that were strong in the respective collecting areas — an attempt to create and strengthen areas of excellence, similar to the pattern of the **Farmington Plan** that was to come into existence some years later. It is amazing that **Hans Harrassowitz** was willing and capable to invest in the collecting of the standing order and subscription items for more than four years. There is no way that a company could do something of the sort today, but, then, we also hope that there will be no need to ever do that again. Our American customers have not forgotten the effort of **Hans Harrassowitz** to maintain his association with his customers under the most distressing and grievous circumstances. They repaid Harrassowitz by a noteworthy and almost incredible act of loyalty, and they all came to the support of rebuilding Harrassowitz in Wiesbaden in the Western part of Germany after the war.

There was no way to continue Harrassowitz in Leipzig which was, eventually, located in the other part of Germany that had, according to the Treaty of Yalta, to be handed over to the Russians. Hans had seen the company through the end of World War II and made sure that there was a modest continuity of the business out of his private home after the office building had been razed to the ground. It became obvious that an international company could not be maintained under communist authority, and so he was wise enough to commission **Richard Dorn**, my

father, to reopen Harrassowitz in Wiesbaden, which was the place where our family had found itself after it got together again after World War II. My father obtained the license that was required to open a company concerned with the information business. Of course, this was not the term they used at the time, but anyone wanting to produce books, journals, or newspapers, run radio stations or engage in book distribution had to obtain a license from the occupying forces in the wake of the American re-education scheme.

ATG: Doesn't this relate to the story that you told us the other day when we spoke about the difficulties in getting started after World War II without any funds or means except the name of a company?

KD: Yes, indeed, — the anecdote involves **Otto Albrecht**, the grand old man of music at the **University of Pennsylvania** in Philadelphia, and it reminds me of the memorable occasion at the annual Congress of the International Music Library Associations of 1979 in Salzburg when I sat together with a number of my American Music Library friends in a Weinstube in the evening to celebrate Otto Albrecht's 80th birthday. It was then that he told us the story of his meeting with my father. He was the officer in charge of the American Commission in Frankfurt responsible for screening and approving applications of people interested in setting up publishing and book businesses. In order to understand the situation, you must be aware that my father was small and wiry, whereas **Otto Albrecht**, the Penn Professor and Music Librarian, was a giant of a man. Otto created a roar of laughter in our round when he gave a vivid description of how "this tiny man came up to my desk giving me his spiel, almost unstoppable, and trying to tell me what Harrassowitz was — and there was I who have been a private customer of Harrassowitz in Leipzig ever since the mid 1920s!" Of course, my father got his license and could set out to begin rebuilding Harrassowitz in Wiesbaden.

ATG: Tell us more about how he did it.

KD: Humble beginnings they were. Living and office quarters were scarce and almost impossible to find. I remember well how my parents' tiny bedroom in the attic of a Victorian villa (11 families lived in that villa that, around the turn of the century, had been the home of just one) was converted into an office during daytime. In the initial period, the book parcels to American libraries were carted to the post office in my brother's baby carriage and stroller, and I have still vivid memories of the long line of frustrated and furious customers when there was that guy Dorn again blocking the post office counter with his parcels destined to go to the United States.

Again, the word got around. It must have been shortly after my father's meeting with Otto Albrecht that, on January 29, 1948, **John Fall**, then Head of Acquisitions at the **New York Public Library**, wrote a letter to Harrassowitz in "Weisbaden". There were no further details in the address beyond that, and Wiesbaden was even slightly misspelled, but the post office got hold of my father and delivered the letter without Harrassowitz officially having been established in Wiesbaden yet. It was almost a miracle, and I remember how often my father told us how encouraging this letter had been for him. Of course, he wrote back answering Mr. Fall that he would indeed be ready to do business with his library again. I have the NYPL letter framed

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in my office today.

The response to the opening of the office in Wiesbaden among American librarians was overwhelming. The business grew, the communists in Leipzig got madder and madder and, finally, they expropriated the company under some pretext, abolishing the name of Harrassowitz in Leipzig altogether. **Hans Harrassowitz** and his wife **Gertrud** left the Russian zone clandestinely and came to Wiesbaden. By that time **Mr. Felix Weigel** had joined my father and began rebuilding the Near, Middle and Far East Department that was concerned with the subject of "Orientalistik" in its widest sense. This had always been a specialty of Harrassowitz, ever since the 19th century. In 1956, **Hans Harrassowitz** changed the corporate organizational form of his company and founded a partnership together with **Mr. Wilfred Becker**, a relative of Mrs. Harrassowitz. Mr. Becker who had in his younger years been trained as a bookdealer took over the business end of the company and contributed greatly to the rebuilding of the firm and to the fact that it regained a leading position in the international booktrade.

When Hans passed away in 1964, his wife was the last bearer of the name Harrassowitz. Some librarians still remember the time when her name appeared on our letterhead as a silent partner. Their son **Friedrich** had been killed in action in World War II at Stalingrad, so there were no direct heirs in the family, and, in order to maintain the company and the name of Harrassowitz, Hans decided to pass his share on to the three gentlemen who had helped him rebuild it after the war. This is how the three families, **Becker**, **Dorn**, and **Weigel**, are the present owners of the company. By now, there is a new generation of owners and directors in place. My current partners in the Becker family are **Wilfred Becker, Jr.**, who has already introduced his daughter **Ruth** into the company. Their responsibility is the financial planning and accounting. Ruth, the youngest among us, is the Comptroller responsible for the financial and management analyses of our various activities. Among the **Weigel** family, it is now **Friedemann**, a son of **Felix**, whose training had been in management and electronic data processing and who is responsible for the information system of our company. Since I am in charge of library services and customers' contacts, it has in the past usually been me who had been most visible to our customers. But there is more to the library services of Harrassowitz than just me. With my partners, **Wilfred Becker**, **Ruth Becker**, and **Friedemann Weigel**, there is an element of mutual trust and respect for the other's contribution to the company. The way the responsibilities have been assigned for each one of us, it looks as if each of us is doing what they can do best, and I am very optimistic and feel very good about our future cooperation, at least for our generation. Each new generation will, of course, have to come to terms again on their own.

ATG: *So it looks as if Harrassowitz is truly one of the few family-run companies that are left in the booktrade and in library services?*

KD: Yes, this is indeed so. We strongly believe in the family-run company. There you get the extra commitment and the sense of personal obligation in the top echelon that can make all the difference. Moreover, we enjoy doing what we do and have, therefore, consistently refused all offers to be bought out.

You might even say that the Dorns were typical of that initial family effort that you get in a reconstruction period. You had asked me how I got involved with the business, and the family tradition has indeed been a major motivation. Not only for me. All three of the Dorn children witnessed Richard's efforts and his achievement. The rebuilding of the company was the common course, and we were all in it together. My sister had gotten her apprenticeship in the booktrade and was assistant to my father for the years that I had spent at the university. Until some years ago I have still met one or the other librarian who remembered her name on the letters. She later decided to pursue her own career and now is a professor at the University of Köln. My brother **Detlef** also was apprenticed as a bookdealer and has dedicated his career to Harrassowitz. He is also a director of Harrassowitz, responsible for the personnel of the Library Services Operation and most of the in-house administration services. Again, he is not that visible to librarians abroad, but his contribution to the company is extremely important and frees me of a lot of obligations that would otherwise prevent me from travelling and maintaining the personal contacts which have always been an important aspect of our library services.

There must have been a fascination to all of us, and it must have had something to do with my father's commitment and drive for the family course. He did a lot of travelling and was very visible to the international library world. Many librarians still remember him fondly, and I received many moving and gratifying letters from the international library community when he passed away two years ago. Richard was very tough, otherwise he could not have managed the reconstruction and overcome the incredible obstacles that were inherent in his task. But he was also a lover of books and in general a very cultured man. There was no difficulty for any of his children to accept his values in life: The books, the untiring curiosity, the enjoyment of life in general, the fine dining and the wine in particular.

ATG: *So there must have been a somewhat dominant influence of your family on you? Did you mind?*

KD: No, I don't think I did. On the contrary, it was a fascinating constellation. I grew up as a child with Harrassowitz in the background, and there was early and constant exposure to the library world. I got to know many of the friends my

father had amongst librarians. They visited our home, and it was fascinating to get to know many librarians personally, such as **Bob Vosper** from UCLA, **Hermann Henkle** of John Crerar, **Dave Kaser** of Vanderbilt and Cornell, **Phil McNiff** of the Boston Public Library, **Jim Babb** of Yale, who later was to be my boss for two years, when I was studying at Yale and worked at the **Sterling Library**. Although I was only a boy at the time, I remember **Mr. Keyes Metcalf** at the dinner table at home when he came to visit in Wiesbaden in 1950 to entrust the German segment of the Farmington Plan to Harrassowitz. There were constant strings of visitors, and meeting librarians became part of my life. I was introduced into theirs, and I began to understand their challenges and to feel close to their profession. There was no doubt in my mind that I wanted to continue the tradition of Harrassowitz by the time I had completed my studies.

ATG: *I remember way back at the Charleston Conference in*

1989 when Dick Dougherty referred with great reverence to the "H word". We were talking about vendor/library relations and trust and excellence, and he was referring to how Harrassowitz was the leader in this area. Recently, also, over the Internet there was a discussion about the "fabulousness" of Harrassowitz. I wonder if you'd talk about the elements that have given you this wonderful reputation.

KD: I think our reputation is based on a number of factors. There is first our participation in what you might call the national professional standing that the booktrade enjoys in Germany, and there is also our specialization in a segment of the profession that we know well and within which

we think we can give the service that our customers expect. Let's talk about the Harrassowitz specialization first. We offer our services for books and journals published in the European countries. Way back in the 19th century, Harrassowitz was a library agency mainly for German publications. At that time, the German language was very important to scholarship in general and to the sciences in particular. That began to change after World War I when the English language gained ground, and when the Nazis drove out the Jewish scientists, the process accelerated. Moreover, after World War II, research and scholarship shifted from Europe to North America, and now English is the unchallenged Lingua Franca in the sciences and in the social sciences.

At Harrassowitz we realized in the 60s that we would not have a chance if we continued to restrict our main activities to just German publications. So we made the decision to profile ourselves as a library service agency for European books and journals, and while this is a relatively broad base, we are still inclined to think of ourselves as specialists, much in tune with the traditional concept of the German booktrade, which is built on the premise that you have to be a specialist to do well. Harrassowitz has gone a different way from some of the other larger library agencies on the international library scene. We have decided to offer our services for the whole spectrum of the requirements of a research library: books, as well as non-book materials, serials, and subscriptions. But, with some exceptions, we restrict ourselves to offer service on publications originating from Europe. So while we supply institutions worldwide, the area covered is Europe. In our current situation, our profile is a question of performance and what you can accomplish. I think it was the German entrepreneur **Bosch** to whom the phrase is attributed: "It is better to lose money than trust." While we, of course, do not want and cannot afford to lose money, we know how important the trust of our customers is in our operation, and we do not want to jeopardize our reputation by promising something that we cannot later fulfill. We are the middleman in our profession, and we have to work well with both customers and suppliers. To be close to your suppliers and to have well-working channels of communication with them is something that we can, at this time, achieve in Europe.

So we have made the decision to remain somewhat of a specialist, and this decision has served Harrassowitz well. We cover a smaller segment of the market, but one large enough to make consolidation attractive to our customers, and our ambition is to do well within this segment.

The other factor relates to our national professional and

business tradition. There is a long tradition and a whole set of business ethics and quality control standards that go with our type of "Mittelstand" company. The direct translation is "medium-sized company" or "middle-class," but these terms do not quite cover the meaning that Germans associate with the "Mittelstand." There is a particular German context that goes with this kind of business, and, traditionally, the keywords for it are: a striving for quality, a preference for private ownership and control, and a commitment for the people who work for you. In a

way, this is our company in a nutshell. We feel deeply committed to our staff. Many of them have been with us for a very long time. As a matter of fact, many of them

"Regrettably, the question of standards of data transmission has not been conclusively solved yet."

have been trained in our own company, and this is part of the typically German system of the apprenticeship to which I have referred a couple of times already. Bookdealing in Germany is an "official" profession which requires 2-3 years of apprenticeship, depending on your earlier schooling. Besides working in a company, young people go to a vocational school, in our case the **Deutsche Buchhändlerschule** in Frankfurt, a school run privately by our booktrade association, financed by the member companies. So, besides the professional routines relating to dealing with customers and publishers, the young people learn about the history of the booktrade, about bibliography, about literature or other fields of specialty according to which they may later wish to choose the kind of company or bookshop for which they want to work. They learn about accounting and taxes, about the intricacies of the German social system as well as about the delicate balance of power and cooperation between management and the union. The Chamber of Commerce supervises the apprenticeship, and there is a state exam for bookdealers, as there is for any of the other professions in Germany.

We have had apprentices in our company for a long time. Many of them stay or come back after they have taken jobs with other bookshops or publishers. As a matter of fact, this additional experience is encouraged, and some of our apprentices have later, upon their return, accomplished a great deal in our company. While we can be flexible in our choice of staff in our very special situation of a library service agency that does not have a retail bookshop and can easily give people with a different professional background a chance, many of our colleagues are full-fledged bookdealers, and this, obviously, makes for a skilled and committed staff. I would say, that in order to answer your question, our staff is probably the key factor, when you look for an explanation for the reputation that you say we enjoy among our customers. And this goes for the staff in both our offices, in Wiesbaden as well as in Maryland.

ATG: Clearly also a lot of Harrassowitz's success is attributable to you and your enormous enthusiasm and energy. What is your training?

KD: I grew up close to academics and if it wasn't to be Harrassowitz, I wanted to be either a college professor or a librarian. As a matter of fact, these exactly turned out to be the choices when, after my years at the University of Frankfurt and an exchange year at Bristol University in England, I went to the United States and did my post-graduate work in American Studies at Yale. Yale had part of the **Eugene O'Neill** estate, and since

my doctoral dissertation was concerned with O'Neill's later works, the **Beinecke** Collection of American Studies was the perfect place for the work I had to do for my dissertation for the University of Frankfurt. At that time I spent two years in New Haven as a library intern at the **Sterling Library**, working in Acquisitions and Collection Development. The librarians **Jim Babb** and **Don Wing** pointed out to me that there was a library school around the corner, and **Professor Demetz** suggested not to slight the career chances within the German Department. But it turned out to be Harrassowitz for me after all. I have already explained what had contributed to this decision. So, in late 1963, I returned to Wiesbaden, and, from then on, there was no question that my career was to be a bookseller for Harrassowitz.

And there are no regrets. My position at Harrassowitz has kept me in very close contact with hundreds of libraries and while, it is true, I have not been able to do any research of my own any longer, my daily work has always kept me close to academia. Within the range of librarianship, it has been collection development that has interested me most. Our approval plan selectors have always reported to me personally and they will continue to do so. This is an area into which a lot of my time has gone at Harrassowitz. It is also an area in which I have met some of the most impressive librarians of the older generation. I cherish the fact that I have still been able to work together with some of the great German and Austrian emigré Collection Development Librarians such as **Felix Reichmann** of **Cornell**, **Rudi Hirsch** of the **University of Pennsylvania**, and **Walther** and **Maria Grossmann** of **Harvard**. I have learned a lot from them, and these professional and personal contacts were very important to me and told me that I had made the right decision. And, there were often very special occasions. I still remember fondly when I said good-bye to **Felix Reichmann** at the farewell party that **Cornell** gave to him at the occasion of his retirement, and when he made the point after so many years and meetings with him to talk to me in German for the first time. It was a very moving gesture of this great librarian that I thoroughly appreciated.

ATG: You have been talking about American librarians all the time. Do you do any business in Germany or other parts of the world, or is your business largely in the US?

KD: Yes, the larger part of our business is indeed in the US. As I have explained, this happens to be our company tradition that goes well back to the very early days of Harrassowitz in the 19th century. As a matter of fact, it can probably be said that all our in-house procedures are geared for service to research libraries in North America, and the organizational pattern of Harrassowitz is pretty much a replica of a functional chart of a US research library. But this has not prevented libraries in other parts of the world to contact us. We have close associations with research libraries in Australia and New Zealand, the Middle and the Far East as well as Western Europe. Australian libraries have always complimented my father as the first European bookseller to have made a personal appearance in their country. Also, German libraries have discovered Harrassowitz recently, and we do share our databases and approval and collection development data with German librarians when it comes to establishing publishing trends or cost projections for German research materials, books and periodicals alike.

ATG: Do you deal with any small libraries or is your clientele mainly large research libraries?

KD: We deal with all types of research libraries, very large libraries, but also smaller libraries and special libraries of all kinds. We have had traditional close connections with Divinity School Libraries, and also with Law Libraries, Fine Arts Libraries, and with Medical Libraries, particularly as our subscription operation has grown in recent years. And there has been, ever since we have established a Music Department at Harrassowitz in the late 1960s, an increasingly close cooperation with music libraries all over the world. We work with more than 3000 libraries in the US alone. And when I tell you that the countries next in line are Canada, Australia, and the UK, it is no wonder that more than 90% of my correspondence is in English.

ATG: How large is your staff?

KD: We have, for some time, been vacillating between 210 and 250. With the recent recession in the United States and flat library budgets practically all over the world, we are now down to 215. We have done this downsizing through lean management and attrition. We are proud that we have never had to dismiss a staff member due to a shrinking market. We are in a situation now in which we can handle growth with fewer staff than five or six years ago. This is very important for the company in view of the ever-rising cost factors and the continuing decline of publishers' discounts.

ATG: How does the liaison work between Wiesbaden and your North American office in Maryland?

KD: Most of our staff and files are in Wiesbaden and this, in effect, is our main office. We have established our North American office almost 20 years ago when **Jane Maddox**, who was Acquisitions Librarian at the University of Tennessee at the time, convinced us that Harrassowitz needed a North American representative. Am I glad that she did! Jane and I still chuckle when we think of my father's first reaction to our proposition when he wondered whether Jane would have enough to do to keep her busy all day in a North American office. Of course, we all know that he couldn't have been more wrong. Jane already had a couple of staff members when her husband **Lorne Kenyon** joined her a few years later, and their office now has 6 people working there. They are online with our office in Wiesbaden and this currently serves as a pilot project that will, we trust, result in an online connection for our customers later in this year.

Times have changed. Correspondence has assumed a different quality. Many transactions are taken care of in Maryland by telephone on our 800-number, and questions regarding technical assistance, price quotes, claims are resolved by email and fax. There is less traditional letter writing. The paper files begin to disappear.

Technology has helped in many respects and has added new dimensions to our activities. My partner **Friedemann Weigel** is responsible for the electronic data processing within our company and he represents us in the international groups that are interested in establishing standards on the basis of EDI for libraries to deal with agents, and for agents to deal with publishers in an electronic environment.

ATG: *EDI is a key word very much in fashion. Tell us what is going on in Europe with regard to EDI. What role does the EU play in this?*

KD: EDI is indeed the key word for all of us involved in the information business and the exchange of data between publishers, agents, and librarians, but EDI must go beyond what we have seen happening in the marketplace so far. Working with electronic transactions has meant working with non-standardized data interchange. We have had to cope with a variety of interfaces, with every medium that you can think of for the transmission of data, as well as different message formats. We, as any other agent, had to try to be compatible with every system and interface available on the market and to cooperate with our library customers no matter what highly individualized requirements they have asked us to meet. All this can be done, but it is extremely costly, and this practice simply cannot be continued in this fashion. The promise of EDI is that it will cover the entire information exchange required for a library-agent business transaction, and this is where there will be the chances for further rationalization and savings for both partners in the information business.

This is why we strongly believe in the efforts to establish standards that can be accepted by every party in the information market. We have to get beyond the current situation and need a standardized and broadly accepted transmission technique which provides for economic transmission of high as well as low data volumes. While we think that this is provided by **EDIFACT**, as a standard structure for messages, we do not lose sight of the requirements of the American market, and we are actively concerned with the implementation of X12 interfaces even if these may, in the long run, only be a temporary measure. Regrettably, the question of standards of data transmission has not been conclusively solved yet. We watch the situation closely that is posed by the **ISO** defined **X.400** protocol and its implementation, as well as by the incredible growth of the traffic of data on the Internet.

The European book market has agreed on a common format **EANCOM**. For books, there have been groups working in Europe such as **EDITEUR** and **EDILIBE**. The latter has been supported by the European Union, and it has, until July of next year, to come up with a set of tested standards for the electronic communication between libraries and the booktrade. There are libraries from Germany, Holland, the UK, Italy and Spain involved as well as the Dutch system provider **PICA** and the three international agencies: **Blackwell**, **Casalini**, and **Harrassowitz**. While the project aims at the institutions of the European Community, and this is why part of the funding of this project had been made available by Brussels, the implications are, of course, much broader. There are parallel efforts made in the US by the **BISAC/SISAC** groups, and we hope for parallel results through close and speedy cooperation of the groups on either side of the ocean.

There are plans to have the **EDILIBE** activities extended to subscriptions and serials when the book program will be completed by mid 1995, possibly together with the **EDITEUR** group which is a group of European publishers, agents, and librarians. Current efforts for subscriptions are made on the American side by **SISAC**, and our American office in Maryland is involved in their activities. Moreover, **Friedemann Weigel** and the staff of our Subscription Department are active in the

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ICEDIS group, an international body of serial publishers and subscription agents that is working on the formulation, the maintenance and the dissemination of EDI standards between publishers and agents. The current objectives are to have the standards for claims and claims/response, for pricing and sales catalogs, for purchase order changes, for orders and invoicing, as well as dispatch data available by June of 1996. We are all in the same boat in this regard in view of the cost pressures that are on everyone involved in the processing of serials data. The development of internationally acceptable standards has to be the prime target for all of the members of the information market at this time. The librarians play the key-role in this. They are the customers and have to make their voices heard. If there is any standardization to be effectively produced and implemented for our market, it has to have the librarians identifying the standards that are optimal for their purposes, that they wish to see implemented by system vendors, by agents, and publishers.

"We . . . live and die with the American Dollar."

ATG: *The information market would have to include article delivery, wouldn't it? Do these efforts and plans that you described include article delivery? Has article delivery made as much headlines in Europe as it has in the States?*

KD: Of course, this is a worldwide and familiar discussion, but just as familiar seem to be the difficulties that have been encountered in getting a system of article delivery underway. It is interesting to see the many agencies and publishers vying for position in this area, but this particular service is not something that we currently feel is a valid proposition for Harrassowitz. We understand the need for this service in the research and academic environment, especially given the budgetary restraints facing libraries in this day and age. But given the very high cost involved with providing this service, we do not feel that the market can possibly support a number of agents offering these services. To try to jump on the bandwagon and offer a "me too" service, in our opinion, would not be a wise decision. The resources required to initiate and finance a document delivery service would be a big drain on company resources, and would dilute our focus on services which we think are more important at this time.

ATG: *You have stressed the cost factor several times, would you talk a bit about discounts, about the exchange rate and about currency issues?*

KD: We, as the middleman in the distribution of information, have to operate on the basis of the discounts given to us by the producers and publishers. Our problem, and this is the problem of every agency operating on the market, is how to cope with increases in the costs of operating a business, at a time when there is also a decrease of the discounts granted to us by publishers. This holds true for the discounts for books as well as for journals. In the past years, this has been particularly painful for the subscriptions, since all the major science publishers have broken through the barrier of 10% that agents have considered a minimum discount for operating a satisfactory library service. Many European publishers now vacillate between 10% and 5%. At that range no state-of-the-art library service can be maintained. Service charges have to be established, and this, of

course, does not go well with the library community that is plagued by ever-reduced budgets and, in turn, exposed to rising costs as well.

The consequence for the agents is a very thin operating level that entails a high risk factor. In this situation, an agency cannot afford to make any major mistake regarding investments, marketing policies, and technology. We have all seen what mistakes in management can lead to, even in well established agencies. But we should also bear in mind that a major contributing factor to this situation of instability of the market is the reduced publishers' discounts that put the agencies in a very precarious situation. It is amazing that the publishers do not want to recognize this, when it is known that more than 80% of the subscriptions are serviced by agencies, which, in turn, confirms that the agencies do offer a service that is appreciated and needed by the library community.

You mentioned the currency situation and this is, of course, a very important factor for us. With our concentration on the North American market, we, at Harrassowitz, so-to-say live and die with the American Dollar. Serving the US market, of course, means that you have to bill in US dollars, and this means that we are extremely susceptible to the volatility of the financial markets. We have to protect our sales for a period of 3 to 4 months within which we can expect our customers to pay their bills. This is done by buying futures, and while this is another cost factor with which we have to cope, by doing so we succeed in minimizing the risk that is involved in a situation in which the US dollars could lose substantially against the German Mark and the other European currencies. Admittedly, by buying futures, we eliminate the possibility of profit from the opposite situation in which the dollar may rise against the European currencies, but the conservative approach is best in the long run. We are a bookdealer and subscription agent and are not in the banking business.

We do not want to have money market speculation come into our professional activities at any time. We owe this to our customers, many of whom have entrusted prepayments to our company, and, of course, we also want our operation to be as safe as possible, in our own interest and the interest of our staff. All this makes the continuity of our business in a mid- and long-term context the target rather than any short-term gains as they might be attainable in a momentarily advantageous currency situation.

ATG: *You spoke of the publishers as another group in the chain of information whose interests can be very different from the ones of the agents, if we think of the discounts and other matters of cooperation. But Harrassowitz also has a Publishing Department and, obviously, has to see the matter from both sides. Can you tell us a little bit about your publishing and also about the German publishing industry in general?*

KD: Yes. We have an active publishing house, and this tradition also goes back to the 19th century. It has always meant publishing in highly specialized research areas, such as Asian Studies including the Near East, Middle East as well as the Far East. Other areas are Books and Librarianship, but also Slavic and East European Studies are prominent. We are the publisher of the publications of the **Herzog-August-Bibliothek** in Wolfenbüttel, and documentation of German library holdings, manuscripts and early prints, have become a specialty of our publishing house over the years. It is very much an international activity, and we publish in any of the western languages, de-

pending on the language in which the authors write. If you are concerned with Turkish dialects or questions of Mongolian grammar or highly specialized areas in Egyptology, it does not matter in which of the western languages the treatise is submitted. Whoever does research in such highly specialized areas has a command of the major western languages as well. A large share of our publishing is, of course, in English, since the English language has become the international language, even for larger segments of the humanities by now.

Although the publishing business for us, represents only a small portion of our overall revenue, it should be noted that we distribute close to 160 new publications per year. These titles are, as can be expected with the highly specialized topics, submitted in short runs of 300 to 500 copies, and I always joke that, in spite of their esoteric nature, every one of these titles will still be in print after the year 2000, even if there is such a short print run to begin with. The obligation to keep books in stock for an extended period of time is part of the old tradition of German publishing. Admittedly, German publishers have a tax advantage over their colleagues in North America and other countries. They enjoy a fairly generous pattern of writedowns and can use more rapid depreciation to decrease the value of their stock. While this does by no means indicate that publishers' stocks are tax exempt in Germany, it does help to have a somewhat favorable tax situation in this regard. I still remember the serious arguing and the active lobbying that the **German Book Trade Association** had to do in order to convince our government to maintain this arrangement. This was the time when the **Thor Power Tool** legislation was introduced in the US, and the German government, of course, thought that this was a great idea and tried in vain to introduce the same kind of regulation.

This was one of the recent situations in which the **German Book Trade Association**, the **Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels**, proved to be a very active and successful trade association. It combines the publishers, the bookdealers and the wholesalers under one organizational roof and usually manages to balance the different interests of the member groups. I have served for many years on some of their committees, such as the export committee, the bibliography committee, and the library bookdealers relation committee, which I have chaired for a number of years. It is in a large degree due to the work of the Book Trade Association that German publishing has managed to obtain the support of the government and a favorable tax situation such as the reduced VAT rate for books and journals and the so-called "Fester Ladenpreis", meaning the fair trade or fixed retail price, comparable to the British net book agreement.

There has always been a highly diversified and strong publishing tradition in Germany. The fact that the German publishers have found a way to cope with highly specialized publishing in small print runs had the consequence, that manuscripts from all over the world reach German publishers that would not have had a chance to get published in their own country. Since publishing has drastically diminished in Russia due to the recent political changes, and since there is less publishing done in the United States at this time, Germany is, along with the UK, the most active publishing market in the world with approximately 60,000 new titles per year. For the area that we cover on our approval plan, and this includes Austria and Switzerland, the annual production figure is about 80,000 new titles per year. Out of these 80,000 titles we have traditionally selected approxi-

mately 20,000 titles as relevant to research and university libraries for inclusion in our database.

ATG: Speaking of your monographic database, is it true that it will soon be available over the Internet?

KD: Yes, this is what we are aiming for. At this time it is only made available to individual libraries. **Harvard** has been in the vanguard and has asked that the new titles that we add to our database be FTPed right into their own processing file on a weekly basis. This program has just started and will, eventually, we are sure, be of attraction to other libraries as well. **Harvard** wanted to use a file transfer via Internet for this purpose, since it was to be a hands-off operation, whereas other libraries such as **Princeton** receive the same information still on tapes. But it will only be a question of time as to when our bibliographical data will be available on the Internet.

We have at this time also discussions with **OCLC** and **RLIN** for the transfer of our monographic data, including the printed music. The **RLIN** connection seems to be the most promising at this time, and the consequences will, of course, be considerable. We will all move further away from the exchange of paper, from selection forms, reports, etc. when the data can be FTPed into larger databases or into a library's processing files directly.

ATG: I know that you travel a lot in the US to visit your customers. How much do you travel a year and how does your wife Renate stand your being gone so much?

KD: This is indeed a subject that has come up at home quite frequently. But I have to say that my family are good sports about my work, even if I may be away from home up to 3-4 months per year. On the other hand, my trips have become shorter than they used to be. I just travel more often. Renate knows that my particular responsibility with Harrassowitz does include the travelling. Being in charge of the library services and the customers contacts, there is no way to avoid the travelling. As a matter of fact, I don't even want to get out of it. I still enjoy it, and there is a tradition to be maintained. Our service has always been highly personalized, and our customers have appreciated the personal attention that we have been able to give to their needs and their individual transactions. Most of my travels are in the United States, as can be expected in the specific Harrassowitz situation, but travelling in Europe is also important, and we do want to see our customers regularly in Australia, New Zealand, South East Asia, etc. Of course, the travel load could not be taken on without the support that I get from Jane

and Lorne in Columbia. We share the conference attendance, and Lorne does actually today do the largest share of the travelling. We make it a point to attend the

"The obligation to keep books in stock for an extended period of time is part of the old tradition of German publishing."

two ALAs, midwinter and summer, and always also attend some of the special library meetings during the year, the medical, the music, the fine arts, and the theology, the **ACRL**, whenever the scheduling permits us to do so.

Renate used to work at Harrassowitz and she has in the past travelled with me on many occasions. She knows many of our

librarian friends and it is again so, that the whole family is involved in my professional work. Also my daughters have travelled with me on a number of occasions and they have become so captivated with the US that they both have decided to spend a year at an American high school and they may well chose to go to college in North America. I am personally very pleased that they took this choice, so I have, obviously, been able to pass on some of the attraction and appreciation that I have always felt for the US, and for American academia in particular.

ATG: *What's your normal day like when you are in town and what do you do when you aren't working at Harrassowitz?*

KD: As you may have guessed, Harrassowitz is indeed more than a full time job for me. Whenever there are special projects going on or when there is a peak demand of correspondence, I do find myself spending a couple of hours at my desk at home in the evenings doing dictation. But, of course, I try hard to keep some of the free time available for the family and for my book collection at home. All the Dorns have been and still are dedicated book collectors. Many librarians will remember my father's library on Goethe, which was one of the finest private libraries on the subject, and this was recognized when the German government bought it shortly before he passed away. It will be the nucleus of the Casa Goethe, the Goethe museum in Rome, that is right now being established by the Federal Republic of Germany. My father's library was the center of the family in which all three children grew up, and this has made a big impression on all of us in our formative years. My personal library centers around Thomas Mann and his family. The Manns were a family of avid writers who have held a fascination for me for a long time. There is also a connection to America, and Thomas Mann's exile years in the United States and his political commitment of that period do, of course, figure prominently in my collection. I always hope that there will be some time when I will have a chance to do some further research based on some of the items that I have been able to bring together.

Libraries have always been important to the Dorns, in many respects, not least of all in the form of the "biblioteca subterranea" as the wine cellar is so endearingly called at Schloss Johannisberg in the Rheingau, only about 10 miles away from Wiesbaden. One of the first things that my father had found out when fate had it that we ended up in Wiesbaden after World War II, was that we, all of a sudden, lived in the center of a famous wine area. This was to become an important part in our local education. All of the Dorns have carried on that tradition that had started with my father's wine cellar. We all have our own now and the one that my wife Renate and I enjoy stocks wines from all over the world that we got to know and appreciate when travelling in California, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and the various parts of Europe. Many of my librarian friends share this hobby, and there have been memorable outings with friends in Napa Valley, Oregon, the State of Washington, Upstate New York, just to mention some of the major wine areas of North America that we have visited in delightful company.

ATG: *Before we close the interview, can you tell me what future trends do you see in our market place? And are you ever*

going to expand and open a full-fledged American office that does not just deal with European books and journals?

KD: The trends that I see for both, North America and Europe, involve a much closer cooperation between people in our industry. There will be more of a cooperative dialogue among librarians and agents and publishers. There will be more of an exchange in regard to the technical and the automation expertise, and it looks as if librarians will make outsourcing a

"... in our profession people have learned never to say never."

decided policy in the future. In the past it has been more of an individual effort in which some agents have offered and promoted services with the intention to relieve librarians of some of their processing load and to strengthen their own position in the marketplace. These efforts have so far largely been a by-product of the agents' own activities regarding documentation, approval plans, data transfer, etc. Now it looks as if librarians will make this a more concerted effort and will require more of a participation of the agents in the larger technical processing area. This will change the picture to quite some extent. The agents' performance will then not just be a by-product, it will have to be custom-tailored to meet the librarians specific requirements, and this can then probably not be performed any longer as a free service. Librarians have already indicated that they are willing to pay a price for such outsourced services, be it selection, cataloging, transfer of bibliographic data, etc. Regardless of how this will be organized, I think that there is a much closer cooperation, especially between libraries and agencies, in the offing, beyond the physical supplying of materials and traditional services.

As to what you call a full-fledged American office which would also offer supply on American publications, this is not part of our plans for the future, at this time. Don't forget that deep down in our hearts we believe in being specialists wanting to do our job well. Before we would offer service on American publications, we would have to prepare ourselves, and a fully operational American office would, of course, then be a *conditio sine qua non*. But I cannot make any promises in this regard. However, as I have said many times, in our profession people have learned never to say never. It will be a question of demand and, of course, for us the issue will be whether we can cope with the cost factor involved. We would also be concerned, and have been whenever we considered the possibility, about a decline in the quality of what we do if we were to take on so much more, and if we were to lose the focus which works so well for us now. ☞

Dr. Dorn told me that when he went into business, he thought he could pursue academic writing on the side. "How naive!" he opines. "I have so many ideas and plans, and there are a couple of unfinished manuscripts, but they probably won't ever see the light of day." Knut Dorn has devoted his life to Harrassowitz, but I'll bet we see some of those manuscripts some day! As he said just a minute ago, never say never!

